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RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement submitted by International Development, Inc., a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following communication, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[6 March 1992]

1. International Educational Development (IED) welcomes the attention given to the issue of the rights of children and the situation of children worldwide. In document E/CN.4/1992/54 we note the large number of ratifications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Because of the large number of ratifications, the failure of certain Governments to ratify is all the more noticeable. Of the major Powers, ratification by the United States of America, India, Germany (the former German Democratic Republic ratified on 2 October 1990), Japan and China are glaringly absent.

2. IED, in conjunction with our colleagues in the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), addressed the issue of debt bondage (the peshgi system), especially in the brick kiln inudstry in Pakistan, at former sessions of the Commission. This issue is also raised by the Special Rapporteur,

Mr. V. Muntarbhorn, in his report (E/CN.4/1992/55, para. 17 and note 37). The Special Rapporteur indicated that a comprehensive law to abolish debt bondage was still pending in Pakistan. Since the Special Rapporteur submitted his report, the Government of Pakistan has passed the legislation. This is a great step forward, but human rights monitors should work diligently to see that the new law is fully implemented.

3. We think it is useful to list the causes of the sale and trafficking of children in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan set out in the report The Flesh Trade: Report on Women's and Children's Trafficking in Pakistan (Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid, Karachi, 1991). These are: 1. Poverty, 2. Illiteracy; 3. Lack of skills, 4. Overpopulation and 5. Kidnapping. The information regarding South Asia, reflected in the reports and work of the Pakistan Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and the Special Rapporteur (see E/CN.4/1992/55, notes 7, 36, 37, 60-63, 65, 72-73 and accompanying text), indicates that much is to be done in that part of the world, especially in the context of the overall improvement of economic and social rights.

4. The situation in South Asia clearly is linked to long-standing poverty. Children's rights questions frequently require inquiry into social and cultural practices because of the pattern of abuses interwoven into the social and cultural fabric of society. This is reflected in, inter alia, article 12 of the draft programme of action for the elimination of the exploitation of child labour (E/CN.4/1992/45, annex).

5. However, the international community faces a new dimension to these problems because of the collapsing economic and social structures such as is now occurring in Eastern Europe. In these countries, including the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the society was accustomed to high standards regarding care of children. Now, especially in the former USSR, the monetary system has collapsed. This has had a devastating effect on children. For example, whereas a daily litre of milk for pregnant and nursing mothers was reasonably prices and available, that daily litre now costs more than the average daily wage.

6. Because of the financial near-impossibility of caring for children, an increasing number of persons in the former USSR are selling their babies. While the situation does not yet match, the thousands of Romanian babies sold (see, i.e. E/CN.4/1991/55, para. 52), the situation is such as to warrant attention. In this regard, the Commission and its Special Rapporteur might work cooperatively with the Governments involved on preventative measures.

7. Measures that are adopted should take into account the obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to maintain and increase, if necessary, social and economic services. Thus, even with the collapse of its currency, Governments are under an obligation to keep services for children at the highest level.

8. The crisis in the Russian Federation in children's issues is beginning to draw the attention of governmental and non-governmental organizations. For instance, one of our collegial organizations, the International Women's Centre

of Moscow, is planning a major conference in Moscow in October. The conference, to be held with the cooperation of the United Nations Department of Public Information Moscow office, will address, inter alia, child labour, the sale of children for adoption and other purposes, alimentary and medical care for pregnant and nursing mothers. IED urges the Department of Public Information to transmit relevant information about the conference and its results to the Special Rapporteur and the Centre for Human Rights. Those wishing more information about the Conference should contact the International Women's Centre, 18, Sadovaya Kudrinskaya, 103001, Moscow, K-1, Russia. Telephone 290-1798, FAX 200 3262.